

An Overview

WASHINGTON'S CHILD SUPPORT PROGRAM



Washington State
Department of Social
& Health Services

Division of Child Support

What is child support?

Child support is a financial contribution made by a parent who does not reside with his or her child. It can also include things like medical insurance coverage, as well as educational and day care expenses. The financial aspect of child support is in addition to a parent's contributions of time, love and emotional support for a child.

Why is child support important?

Children are our future. Financial and emotional support from their parents is important. Children need support from both parents, even when one parent leaves the home.

This support can help give children a better chance at life, and can improve a child's standard of living.

Children learn from what they see adults do. Seeing a parent give or receive support may encourage children to be equally responsible parents when they grow up.

When parents don't pay child support, who pays the bill?

Sometimes one parent carries the entire responsibility for the children, but not every parent can do it alone. Sometimes public assistance can be temporary help for a single parent. However, this means that the taxpayers pay the cost of supporting the children.

What is the Division of Child Support's role?

The DSHS Division of Child Support (DCS) is committed to providing effective child support enforcement services. Part of our mission is to help families avoid or break the cycle of poverty.

We do this by establishing appropriate support obligations and encouraging payment by noncustodial parents. DCS helps taxpayers by enforcing parents' financial responsibility for their children. DCS operates the Washington State Support Registry (WSSR), a central clearing house for child support payment processing.

Who is eligible for DCS services?

DCS provides services automatically when:

- A support order says the paying parent should make support payments through WSSR.
- A child is in foster care.
- Public assistance is or has been paid for a child when one or both parents are absent from the child's home.

DCS also provides services to people who ask for them. You can apply if you are:

- A person who has physical custody of a dependent child when at least one parent is out of the child's home. There does not have to be an order for support. If you don't have a support order, we can establish one.
- A person who owes child support.
- A parent or caretaker who wants to establish paternity for a dependent child.
- A person who used to have custody of a child and you are owed back support under a support order.

What services does DCS offer to help children?

Order Establishment

You don't need to have a support order to ask for DCS services. DCS can often use the administrative process to establish a child support order. If necessary, we can refer a case to court to establish paternity.

If a support amount has not been set, DCS may establish an administrative child support order. When DCS establishes an order using the administrative process, the parents have hearing rights.

Most administrative orders require child support payments and medical insurance coverage for the child. These orders may also require payment of day care expenses. Administrative

orders do not address access or visitation rights. Either party to an administrative order can choose to go to court instead.

Sometimes the parents of a child were not married to each other when the child was born. They might have signed a voluntary acknowledgment of paternity. If so, support may be set administratively. If not, paternity can be established in court. A county prosecuting attorney's office handles entry of a child support order and parenting plan.

For more information about establishing paternity, please contact your nearest DCS office and ask for our paternity brochure. You may also ask to talk to someone about your questions.

Collection

Once support has already been set administratively or by a court, DCS can enforce the current and past due child support. At the same time, we can collect daycare expenses and spousal support. DCS can collect unpaid medical expenses and sometimes interest on unpaid support can be included. Sometimes expenses or interest must be set as a court judgment.

Review and Modification

From time to time DCS reviews support orders for modification. Review may be done on any DCS case. No request is needed if a parent receives public assistance for the child. Parents receiving non-assistance support services may ask DCS to review their support order. This service is available to both parents. The review is based on both parties' income. The best available income information is used. Conducting a review does not mean that the order will be changed.

Payment Processing

DCS provides payment processing and records maintenance through the Washington State Support Registry (WSSR). WSSR gives parents a central payment location, and payment records are available to either parent.

Most child support orders entered in Washington State require that payments be made to the WSSR. Payment processing may be the only service needed if there are no public assistance payments for the child(ren). Either party may file a written request for full collection services.

How does DCS enforce child support orders?

DCS enforcement services may include all or some of the following:

- Withholding up to 50% of net income.
- Withholding up to 50% of Unemployment Compensation Benefits.
- Withholding up to 50% of Labor and Industries monthly disability payments.
- Withholding up to 100% of permanent or partial disability payments.
- Attaching bank and other accounts.
- Intercepting federal income tax refunds.
- Filing liens against real and personal property.
- Enrolling children in employer provided health insurance plans.
- Seizing vehicles and other property.
- Referring cases to county prosecutors for contempt proceedings.
- Certifying various state-issued licenses for suspension.

- Seizing lottery winnings over \$600.
- Asking the State Department to deny Passport Renewal.
- Reporting child support debts to Credit Bureaus.
- Posting delinquent parents to an Internet Most Wanted Web Site.

Location Services

DCS may be able to help a custodial parent locate the other parent. This service is offered to establish, enforce, or modify a support order. If there is no case with DCS, call (360) 664-5000 or 1-800-442-5437.

Request an application for locate services. If there is already a case, contact the DCS field office assigned to your case.

Interstate Collection Services

When one of the parents lives in another state, DCS may:

- Attach the obligated parent's wages or bank account in another state, if we have information on the employer or account.
- Ask the state where the obligated parent lives to collect for us.
- Accept collection requests from other states when the obligated parent lives in Washington.
- Open a case at the request of a parent living in another state.
- File a claim to collect from a federal income tax refund.

Interstate collection may take more time. Some states may have limitations that make the process more difficult. DCS is working with other states to make the collection process between states work faster and better.

Although Washington provides free child support services, the other state might charge you fees for certain services.

For specific information about Interstate Collection, call your local DCS office. Ask for the Across State Lines brochure. You can also order, view or download this brochure from the DCS Web Site: <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/dcs/brocure.shtml>

What resources does DCS have to find information about a noncustodial parent?

DCS matches information about the noncustodial parent with many data sources. Below we list just a few of our sources:

- Department of Licensing.
- Reporting by Washington and other state's employment security.
- Reports by employers when they hire new employees.
- Financial Institution reporting.
- Department of Revenue.

Are there services DCS does not provide?

Yes. DCS cannot:

- Enforce property settlements.
- Decide custody disputes.
- Enforce access and visitation provisions of an order.
- Collect your attorney's fees.

How does a person apply for services?

When the custodian receives public assistance from Washington State for the child, DCS is already working for them. A new application is not needed.

When the child does not receive public assistance the parent or custodian can apply for DCS services. These services are available even if the parent or custodian lives in another state. Washington provides its child support services at no charge.

A written application is required. You can download and print a copy of the application at the following Web Site address:

<http://www.dshs.wa.gov/dcs/services3.shtml#near>

To request an application for support enforcement services call 1-800-442-KIDS.

How do I receive child support payments?

- Direct Deposit or Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) allows DCS to deposit funds directly to your bank account.
- The DCS Stored Value Card allows for automatic deposit to the card and it can be used in any ATM machine. For more information about the DCS Stored Value Card and other DCS payment options call 1-800-468-7422. You can also download and print the DCS Stored Value Card brochure with the attached Enrollment Certificate from this Web Site address: **<http://www.dshs.wa.gov/dcs/pdf/dcscard.pdf>**
- DCS can also send out checks using the United States Postal Service (Regular Mail).

How can I help DCS establish or enforce my child support order?

You can help DCS by giving information when you have it.

- Give DCS all requested information about the parent. The request may be via phone call or a form. From time to time DCS may ask for more recent information about the other parent's address or employer.
- Give DCS all the information asked for on the application.
- Inform DCS of any changes in custody or residence of the children.
- Inform DCS of any changes in the parent's address, employer, or assets.
- Provide the non-custodial parent's correct Social Security Number.

- Provide a copy of all related child support orders, when you have a DCS case.
- Give DCS clear and complete payment information.

DCS staff members want to help each family. They want to help as efficiently and as completely as possible. You can help us do this by limiting case-related calls and correspondence to urgent questions and new information.

You can obtain current payment information without talking to a representative. Call 1-800-442-KIDS on your touch tone phone. You must have your case number to access your case information.

How long does it take before payments start?

The length of time depends on several things. If there is no child support order, one will have to be established. Sometimes DCS is able to enforce an order within the first month. Other times it takes much longer. Sometimes we may be unsuccessful because the obligated parent:

- Moves and the new address is unknown.
- Changes jobs often.
- Lives in another state and does not have assets DCS can attach.
- Lives in a country without a joint collection agreement.
- Uses aliases or hides assets in another person's name.
- Is on public assistance or supplemental security income (SSI) or has no assets.
- Disputes the obligation and seeks relief through a court or an administrative forum.
- Is in jail, work release, or a drug/alcohol rehabilitation center.

What if the obligated parent lives on an Indian Reservation or is employed by a tribe, tribal enterprise, or an Indian-owned business located on a reservation or trust land?

There are 29 Native American Tribes in Washington State which are recognized as independent, sovereign governments with similar status as other states and foreign nations. Federally recognized tribes have exclusive jurisdiction over their tribal members and tribal lands, unless restricted by the federal government.

DCS does not have authority to attach on-reservation assets and income without tribal consent, but DCS may attach off-reservation assets and income.

DCS works with tribes to obtain cooperative agreements for establishing and enforcing child support obligations on Indian reservations.

Persons with Disabilities:

If you need other special assistance (such as a sign language interpreter or alternate format materials) because of a disability, we can provide help free of charge.

If you would like more information
you may contact DCS at

1-800-457-6202

or by calling the KIDS Line:

1-800-442-KIDS.

For all written correspondence,
please use the following address:

Division of Child Support

P.O. Box 11520

Tacoma, WA 98411-5520

You may also visit our Internet Web Site at:

<http://www.dshs.wa.gov/dcs/>



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